

*The Land Ethic:
A Christian Look at Mankind's Responsibility to Creation.*

*An Honors Thesis
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*The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.*

*Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.*

There is no speech, nor are there words;

Their voice is not heard.

*Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.*

*In them He has placed a tent for the sun,
Which is a bridegroom coming out of his chamber;*

It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.

*Its rising is from one end of the heavens,
And its circuit to the other end of them;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

---Psalm 19:1-6

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Preface

It was nearing 4:30 in the morning on what promised to be a beautiful day in July in the rugged Southern Rockies of New Mexico. I, and one other young man, had decided the night before that we were going to force ourselves to get up bright and early to see the sun rise over the rock formation near our camp. It was to be our last day in "God's country" and we wanted to make sure that we missed nothing in our quest for a summer that we would remember for a lifetime. I had already had some wonderful experiences in the mountains and valleys of New Mexico, but what lay ahead promised to be something that would change my outlook on life.

Once awake, we traversed some rock formations for about fifteen minutes by the light of the moon until we reached the destination on which we had settled the afternoon before. Upon arrival we found a good place to set down our packs. Once we had settled in, I happened to look straight up--and what I saw placed me into a state of awe. The colors were more brilliant than any piece of art in any museum in the world. The sky was God's canvas and He had arranged everything on that early morning in such a way that no man could stand in any state other than amazement. He knew every star in that sky that caused such splendor.¹

Then, only a few minutes later, the horizon began to glow with a radiance beyond words. I hurriedly prepared my camera to take the pictures of a lifetime. The rush was premature because the sun slowly crept its way over the eastern horizon. Thank God it did. What an indescribable moment that was. It is truly impossible to explain what that moment did in my life.

Yes, I have some pictures from that morning, but no two-dimensional picture can come close to capturing what I experienced that day. There is no way that anyone could experience what I did that morning and then proceed to tell me that there is no God. The order, the brilliance, the vibrancy, the rainbow of colors, the intricacy of the universe, and just the experience testify that there is a God.² That day was more to me than just the observance of an amazing sunrise; it was truly a spiritual experience.

In the first chapter of Romans the Apostle Paul writes, "For since the creation of the world *His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen*, being understood through what has been made..."³(emphasis added). That day everything was all so clear. It was as if a light just turned on and I knew that God was showing me His glory through the wonder that is His creation. That experience led me to examine how I personally viewed His creation. I knew, then and there, that God was calling me to do something personally to help care for His world. That experience has led me to look at how Christianity has regarded the land and if it is in conjunction with what the Bible teaches.

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Introduction

Over the years, many people have put forward biased views of Christian teaching about the environment. Some see the Bible as giving license to exploit the earth. Others see the Bible as teaching that the earth should be cared for but that it does not really matter because “in the end” everything will be destroyed and then renewed. Still others hold the proper view, that the Bible teaches respect and benevolence towards creation.

What needs to happen is that all those who hold a biased view of the Christian teaching need to actually “dig” into the text. When a thorough examination of the text, followed by expositional teaching on the Biblical ethic toward creation, is given, many misconceptions will no longer exist. The Bible is an intricate piece of work written over an extensive period of time. Each author was fully inspired by God⁴ to write what is found in the original text. According to many scholars, the Bible was written by some thirty-five different authors and each book reflects the style of that particular author. A simple and quick examination of the text will not lend itself to a proper interpretation.

Each of the following sections will address a different subject relating to the development of the Christian land ethic. The sections will simply discuss what their titles indicate. The drawing of thoughts and bringing forth of major conclusions at the end of each section will not occur. The major conclusion and implications of this paper will take place within the context of the final section.

The purpose of this paper is to simply build on what the Bible teaches and then to present the ethic that is so clearly taught. Hopefully, this paper will clear up the many misconceptions that exist about Christianity in relation to the environment. One must understand that the Christian call to care for the environment is out of love for the Maker, not of love for the earth per se. A Christian's first obligation is to his/her Maker, and from that comes many responsibilities, one of which is the care for creation.

Both the role of man and the role of God will be addressed. These are the two main participants in the environmental issue. Topics such as legislation and "militant" environmentalism will not be discussed. What needs to be understood is that, in my view and the view of many scholars, there is a God, and because of that, all people, no matter their religious affiliation, have a responsibility to care for the earth.

I sincerely hope this essay will enlighten those who have a love for nature and God's creation, as well as be a call to all to care for God's earth. As C.S. Lewis once said, "Because God created the Natural--invented it out of His love and artistry--it demands our reverence."⁵

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The role of God in Creation

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth", states Genesis 1:1. This verse is the basis and framework from which the Christian land ethic will emerge. Without a frame of reference, the body of this work would have no skeleton. The basic question of where the world came from is where any essay addressing the topic of the environment must start.

In The Holiness of God, by R.C. Sproul, that question is addressed. Sproul first examines the nature of God. To understand the nature of God one must first look at the acts of God. Sproul implicitly asks, what is the first source of knowledge that we have about God?⁶ If there were no books or language or any formal communication, the only source of knowledge we would have about God would be our immediate surroundings. When one walks about outside many things are experienced. The smell of fresh cut grass, flowers in full bloom, the dog next door, the sound of a cricket, etc...but where did all of this originate? How did this earth come to be? Well, as was stated before, that can be found in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. God created the universe as we know it---"in the beginning."⁷

Modern scientific theories say that the world was created by chance. In essence what these theories propose is that nothing created nothing. "Nothing" is not a tangible substance. It is, for lack of a better word, nothing. You can not touch, taste, see, smell or experience nothing. Try to think of nothing and you will end up thinking about something. "Nothing" does not exist at the present time; but here is the catch...in the beginning there was nothing. God created the

universe out of nothing. He spoke and His words put the process of creation into motion.⁸

God did not form the heavens and the earth out of something. He created them simply by His spoken word. The Hebrew word *bara* suggests that creation came from nothing.⁹ In the sense implied by this particular Hebrew verb, only God can be the subject. All other Hebrew verbs for “create” have greater leeway and can have both human and Divine subjects. However, in the context of the passages dealing with creation, the implication is that God created what is now seen from absolutely nothing. Vine’s Expository Dictionary states that “a careful study of the passages where *bara* occurs...the writer uses scientifically precise language to demonstrate...the object of concept [came] into being from previously nonexistent material.”¹⁰

When one looks at the spectacular works of art that someone like Da Vinci “created” the brilliance is easily seen. However, Da Vinci did not create his works of art from nothing. He always had substance from which to work. He had previously existent material. Painters can not exist without paint. Writers can not exist without words. But God created the earth with nothing but His word. In the words of Saint Augustine, “His Divine Imperative.” It was a simple act of the will that caused the creation of the earth and universe. The acknowledgment of creation is probably the most significant step to forming the Christian land ethic.

If one continues on in the first chapter of Genesis, it states that God looked down upon “...all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”¹¹ This Earth truly is “very good.” God intended for the earth to be a perfect place; a place that was the ultimate good. The garden of Eden is the most perfect place that ever existed. That is an amazing thought knowing what the earth is like at present. The earth is so full of the glory of the Lord in all that it contains.

Simple observation of the intricacy of this world would lead one to come to the conclusion that this world did not come into existence by chance...it was created.

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The Role of Man in Creation

Man's role in creation was initially very passive. Man had nothing to do with the actual creation of the heavens and the earth. As was previously established, that was wholly the work of God. However, the intention of God in creating man is extremely important. Man was created to have fellowship with God. That made man unique and separate from everything else within the act of creation.

The first thing that truly sets man apart is found in the verse that states; "Then the LORD God *formed* man....(emphasis mine)." ¹² If one does not read this statement carefully (or simply ignores the emphasis) the major implication of the verse will be missed. The Lord formed man; He did not simply speak man into existence. This shows that from the very beginning God intended something special for man. Man was not created in the same spectacular and awesome way as the rest of creation. No, man was formed by the very hands of God!

Not only did God form man with His very own hands but He also "breathed into his nostrils the very breath of life; and man became a living being." ¹³ The Lord gave man life from Himself. This shows the personal relationship that the Lord intended to have with mankind.

Imagine a sculptor who has just formed the most magnificent piece of art in the universe. It has been the sculptor's lifelong ambition to create something as beautiful as this. He simply stands in amazement at what he has created. Then, right before your very eyes, he picks up the figure and puts his mouth over it. You wonder what is going on. This guy must be insane. Then

you see his former piece of art in a new light. It is alive and breathing. It runs, jumps and causes joy in the eye of its creator. The sculptor has just created life. He has done something never before conceived of; he has created life out of something lifeless. He loves his creation and desires only the best for it. Nothing will stand in his way of loving that creation. And as a result, the creation is forever indebted to his maker and should always strive to please the sculptor. Without the act of the sculptor creating him, the new life would never have existed.

God created man and then He breathed his very breath into man to give him life. Then man became a living, breathing, walking, thinking, sentient being. Once again, God was totally responsible. Without God, man would have never come into being. Man was only a passive actor in the role of creation. Mankind's role was simply to follow the rules of his Creator. Everything in the universe contains rules that govern its movements, why should mankind be any different?

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Role of History in the Environment

With the establishment of God as the creator of the universe, another question arises. Why would a benevolent Creator allow the earth to deteriorate as has been seen throughout history? There is no debating that the earth could definitely be in better shape than it is, but why is it like this? Did God cause this? Was it a certain code of ethics that was followed by a majority of the human race? Several suggestions have been offered by those who consider wilderness their life. One such idea is put forth in the book Wilderness and the American Mind by Roderick Nash.

Nash proposes that in the Hebraic tradition wilderness was not looked upon fondly by those who lived in the Old Testament times.¹⁴ Nash proposes throughout much of the chapter entitled *Old World Roots of Opinion* that the Judeo-Christian perception of wilderness was at best one of aloofness.¹⁵ Throughout the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition the wilderness was seen as a place of purification and a time to bring focus back to the Lord. Experiences such as the Exodus from Egypt were for purification of faith. As the Israelites wandered, they came once again to depend on the Lord.¹⁶ They realized that their religion truly taught that the Lord is the only thing in the universe in which they were to fully place their trust and significance. However, the Hebrews had short memories, and once things got better they again returned to their old ways. Even though the Hebrews had been purified in the wilderness they continued to view it, as Nash notes, as a place that was of no real use.

However, just because the Hebrews viewed the wilderness as such does not necessitate coming to the conclusion that God views "wilderness" in the same light. Earlier it was stated that the Lord viewed the world as very good. God desired for the earth to be perfect, but because of reasons to be discussed later it no longer is a perfect and unfallen world. It contains areas that are desolate and frightening to all men.

Throughout time men have viewed desolate places as wild and uninviting. And quite possibly this is what has led to the decline in the state of our natural environment. If a certain environment is viewed as desolate, then it is seen as having no use. Obviously, this is not a valid conclusion, but it is very prominent in not only the Judeo-Christian world but in all cultures. However, following his accusations against the Judeo-Christian world, Nash points out that many of the eastern religious traditions hold a respect for the environment.¹⁷

Though that is very true, it does not mean that those who espouse these philosophies have not been guilty of damaging the environment. The majority of eastern religions do hold the earth in very high regard, some to the point of worship, yet problems have still transpired. Look at India, for example. That country has an environment in which few from the west would chose to live. It is overcrowded, has a polluted water supply and many other environmental problems. Those who live in India are basically Hindu and Buddhist in religious orientation. Both religions teach an undying respect for the earth and all that it contains, yet there is still damage done to that environment daily. Why have these religions not been "blamed" for the state of our environment while Christianity has?

In more recent history the emergence of the New Age movement has brought hope for the

world into the eyes of many. Since its beginnings, this movement has generally held the environment in high regard. Although this movement came into prominence in the 1960's its roots run much deeper. The New Age movement draws heavily from the belief systems of many, if not all, of the non-western religious traditions (i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.). Those who hold to the beliefs of the New Age feel that "science, technology and a higher standard of living...[does] not necessarily produce happier human beings or make the world a better place."¹⁸

One such New Age belief emerges from the *deep ecology* movement. It is the theory of Gaia. James Lovelock, an atmospheric scientist, was the originator of the Gaia hypothesis.¹⁹ Gaia is a cybernetic system in which one believes that the earth is alive and that all aspects of the earth effect one other. It is very much an earth-centered system. Lynn Margulis, a leading proponent of the Gaia theory, has said that "Gaia is less harmful than standard religion. It can be very environmentally aware. At least it is not *human centered* (emphasis mine)."²⁰ The only statement by her that is true is wedged between two statements of extreme bias. Both the first and last sentence are clear examples of the New Age and scientific world's bias against standard religion (i.e. Christianity). The statement that "(Gaia) is not human centered" needs to be addressed. Christianity, in its pure form, is not human centered either; it is God centered. Christ's call for mankind to "deny himself "²¹ is clearly not one that is centered upon humanity. (The idea of Christ's call to mankind will be addressed in more detail later.)

New Age philosophy undermines Biblical Christianity by attributing a sense of divinity to the earth. However, this is not an accusation against the New Age movement. Many Christians could learn a great deal about respect for the earth that the proponents of the New Age teach.

Yet, Christians must understand why they should have a respect and a love for the earth, not out of obligation to the earth, but out of obligation and love for God.

To demonstrate this fundamental difference in belief more clearly one can go to the Oxford University's Global Forum for Survival in 1988. There Mother Teresa and James Lovelock articulated the differences. Mother Teresa stated that if we take care of the people on the planet, the earth will survive. However, Lovelock stated that if we take care of the earth, humanity's problems will be solved.²² There is a very clear difference. Mother Teresa sees humanity as the ultimate creation, as God's chosen object of fellowship. While Lovelock sees that the earth is the most important. He rejects the Christian view of man being the highest being on the ladder of creation. Both of these well respected persons desire to solve the problems of humanity; however, their means are very different for reaching the common end.

Examining history can do much to show the changing attitudes toward the earth within the dominant social paradigm of the times. The environment clearly has not been taken care of properly over time. However, this section was not to lay blame or excuse any one manner of thinking. Yet, it was to show that religion, per se, is not to be faulted if those who have held these beliefs have damaged the environment. No major religion that has been examined over the history of time is to be faulted for the earth's woes, people are.

Simply because a group of people have often held inappropriate views toward the environment and caused damage to it, does not mean that the religion that they profess is responsible for the damage. The Judeo-Christian teaching on the environment is not the cause of our problem, nor is New Age or eastern philosophy. It will be clearly demonstrated that the

Judeo-Christian tradition as well teaches respect for the environment, but out of a different motivation than do the eastern and New Age religious philosophies. The environmental problem, very simply, has been the cause of careless actions of people of all religious persuasions.

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Role of Man in Creation: Today

Once the foundational principle of the creation of the world has been established, two questions need to be addressed in relation to God's role in the earth today. First, what is the role of man in caring for creation at present? Second, what is the role of Christ in relation to creation. Finally, these two answers will be brought together for the creation of a land ethic.

The role of man in creation today can be found, for the most part, within a few verses of the book of Genesis. God gave man his assignment on the earth nearly right away. The Lord took man, as soon as he had been created, and put him in the most perfect place ever to exist on the face of this planet.²³

God placed man in the garden of Eden where "every tree that (was) pleasing to the sight and good for food"²⁴ was growing. It was a perfect place, a utopia in which no creature or object had ever roamed. Man had not yet had the chance to defile what God had created for him. God then gave man his charge, his purpose in life. "[T]he LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to *cultivate* it and *keep* it (emphasis added)."²⁵ The words "cultivate" and "keep" are extremely key words in Scripture that lead to the development of a Christian land ethic, which will be addressed in more detail later.

Following the episode of God placing man into the garden, God desired to make a helper for man. So God made "every beast of the field and every bird of the sky"²⁶ for man to name and to see if any would be an appropriate helper. Now the fact that the "beasts of the field" were

made after man does not remove his prominence on the ladder of creation. The Lord had said in the first chapter of Genesis that man would “rule over the fish...birds...cattle and over all the earth.”²⁷ These animals were created for the benefit of man, not the other way around. God designed animals to be there to help and to serve man.

Man was given the responsibility to name all of the animals. This is very crucial to man’s dominance over the animal kingdom. In our culture, past and present, naming of something means that there is a position of influence and authority held by the one giving the name. As a child, one’s parents do not ask what that child wishes to be named; the child is simply given the name that is decided upon. Parents have a position of authority over their child. Naming is simply one way that this authority is expressed. The act of Adam naming all of the animals that roamed the earth shows that man then, as well as today, has prominence over the animal kingdom. Man is to be a ruler over all the organisms of the earth.

Then the Lord says to man and woman (who had been created as a helpmate) that they are to “[b]e fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”²⁸ This verse is used many times by critics of Judaism and Christianity as a proof text that the Christian tradition espouses the exploitation of the earth. That is both a wrong assumption and an unfair accusation. Strokes and movements of ink on a parchment or paper have no power in and of themselves; however, misinterpretation of those words can lead to destruction.

It is true that in the past, and even in the present, many people are not properly caring for the earth because of their skewed interpretation of this specific Scripture. Many feel that the rule

and subdue portion of this Scripture gives a manifesto for exploitation. However, to rule in Old Testament times one had to be benevolent in his actions toward his subjects. If a ruler was not benevolent, most likely he would be ousted from power. Anyone who is being ruled over desires that their ruler will be kind and have their best interest in mind. Humans need to have the earth's best interest in mind, not only the "natural environment", but also other human beings. It is a delicate balance, but one that needs to be found and continued upon. Nevertheless, many "environmental watchdogs" blame Christianity, and that is a false conclusion to the facts that are present. God inspired those who wrote the Bible. He gave them the very words that they wrote down, and in the original text the Bible is inerrant and inspired fully by God. The Lord did not cause man to harm the earth. Mankind needs to take responsibility for their own actions.

Regardless, if one has a proper interpretation of this Scripture, this verse is not one on which an accusation can be based, but one which can be used to continue to build a Christian land ethic. Man was given the awesome task of ruling the earth. Humans are the only beings on the earth with the capacity to reason and build upon that reason. Man has learned to control things like fire that those in the animal kingdom can not control. Mankind is the most capable being on the planet to rule, subdue, fill and multiply the earth. Man has done what, on the surface, this verse prescribes. Mankind does rule the earth; mankind has placed the rest of creation in subjection; mankind has also multiplied and filled the earth. However, with this command comes a responsibility to the earth that in many cases mankind has not fulfilled.

But why has mankind failed to fulfill this command given by the Creator? For this next portion of the text much credit needs to be given to the work of Dr. Ravi Zacharias, whose book

Can Man Live Without God truly exposes a deep problem in society today.

A main problem in today's society is the way that mankind has chosen to define life. Modern science has chosen to define everything in purely mechanistic terms. All things must be explained by science and with this emphasis there comes a loss in the "childlike sense of wonder." With this loss of wonder comes a few direct consequences.²⁹

First, there comes a reductionist attitude, or simply a loss of respect for life. Life is reduced merely to the molecular structure. If one began to look at their spouse in merely molecular terms it is doubtful that the marriage would be meaningful or that it would last beyond the point of simple sexual gratification. All things besides human life become elevated and therefore life is reduced to utter insignificance. When man does not view himself in the proper context then he will not view the rest of creation in the proper light.

The second consequence of a loss of wonder is a loss of gratitude. This is the most telling consequence in relation to the environment. Due to the loss of wonder and the materialistic view of all things there becomes, in effect, nothing (or no one) to be grateful to. Wonder leads to gratitude. At the end of an amazing act of heroism, gratitude is properly shown to the hero. The act of heroism is one of total selflessness (in its pure form) and truly brings wonder to the recipient. Why someone would risk their life for another is not logical, but the gratitude that is paid to the hero seems to make it all worth while. Gratitude is to a natural outworking of wonder, and where can more wonder be found than in God Himself and in the universe He created?

These consequences of a materialistic and mechanistic world-view in conjunction with the inevitable progression in technology have led to disasters in our environment. In mankind's

attempt to control aspects of creation he has ended up stretching his limits and causing harm to the environment. Oil spills, nuclear fallout, car exhaust, etc... are all examples of how mankind has learned to control things, but not quite to the extent of harmlessness to the environment. These advances in technology are meant to make life easier for mankind, and in the short-run they have. However, long-term effects were generally not examined when technology was in its budding stages. Had there been more of a respect for the Creator of this environment and gratitude for what was created and given to mankind these failures may have been avoided.

The beginning of an ethic to live by which could have helped mankind avoid these catastrophes can be found in the second chapter of Genesis. There the Lord placed man into the garden of Eden to "cultivate it and keep it."³⁰ This command was given to man before the Fall. Man has an innate desire to care for things. Only fallen man has any kind of desire to destroy and ravage the earth and the people that inhabit it. Unfortunately "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"³¹, and therefore there is no one on the earth who is not a fallen being. Yet the responsibility of mankind is still to cultivate and keep. But what weight do these words carry with them as far as the responsibility of mankind to creation?

The Hebrew root of cultivate is *abad*.³² This word carries with it the connotation of becoming slaves of the land, or slaves to the land. Much the way man is either a "slave to sin" or a "slave of Christ." By being a slave in the proper context there comes freedom.

However, one must have the proper definition of freedom for this to be true. Freedom, in the eyes of the world, is the right to do anything that is desired. This is in stark contrast to the Christian definition, that being the ability to do what is right. When man becomes a "slave of

Christ” he then possesses the power to do what is right and true freedom is experienced. Man cannot do anything to please God outside of Christ,³³ and properly caring for His creation is definitely something that would show gratitude.

If man does not cultivate the land, the land becomes overrun and unprofitable in the economic sense of survival. So as one works for the land it becomes for the cultivator a release from the fear of an out-of-control “wilderness.” All agree that man needs food to survive. If man stops properly caring for the earth, then the environment will become one that is foreboding in its innate nature. In this instance caring entails properly utilizing the resources (i.e. farming properly, grazing cattle responsibly--not overworking the land, etc...). Also, if man would stop caring for the earth he would only be sinning further. We are commanded to cultivate. To be a man is to work.

Those men who do not work, do not feel complete. Work makes the man. Without the act of working many men feel that they have absolutely no reason to live. Work must also have some purpose for it to carry any meaningful reward. This idea can be illustrated with a true story from the era of World War II.

In a concentration camp in Hungary, Jews were forced to distill tons of human waste and garbage into a fuel additive to be used to power the Nazi juggernaut. Even though those prisoners knew what their work was being used for they continued month after month. But in 1944 the Allies started bold air strikes deep into the heart of Europe. One night the Allies struck the camp in Hungary and the factory was destroyed. The next morning the prisoners were ordered to move the charred remains of the factory from one end of the compound to the other.

The prisoners' unwanted thoughts were that the Nazi's were going to make them rebuild the factory. However, the next morning they were ordered to move the remains from the end they had just transferred them to back to the other. Day after meaningless day they continued moving the mountains of rubble from one end to the other. After several weeks men began to lose it. Prisoners who had survived years began to run into electrical fences to get away from the senselessness of it all. Dozens upon dozens of men began to go crazy.

The commandant of the camp had ordered this activity as an experiment in mental health to see what people would do when faced with absolutely meaningless work. Fyodor Dostoevsky, who himself had spent ten years in prison wrote that, "forced to move a heap of earth from one place to another and back again-I believe the convict would hang himself.... preferring rather to die than endure...such humiliation, shame and torture." This is as a clear example that for a person to feel he/she is useful there must be meaning to their existence. But where could one find this meaning? One way would simply be to do what the Lord has commanded. And one of those commands is the proper cultivation of His land.³⁴

The next word in the command that God gave to Adam is "keep." The Hebrew root of keep is *samar*.³⁵ This brings with it the idea of keeping watch over something, preserving it diligently. As well as the idea of preservation, it also carries with it the idea of retaining or conserving some of the land. Mankind is not only to protect the land that is in use, but also keep watch over the unused portions. So for those who are either conservationists or preservationists in their ideology of the land, both have a portion of the Christian ethic. However, neither one contains the full truth of the Christian ethic. Humans are to both cultivate, to work the land for

survival, as well as to preserve and retain some for the benefit of the whole.

Man was given the ultimate responsibility of caring for the garden. However, man fell into sin--and because of that, the order of creation was set awry. In the beginning Adam was given several commands, and along with those that have been discussed he was given another. This command was simply to not eat of the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. This simple command Adam could not even keep, and so in Genesis 3:17 God told man, "[c]ursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life." Because of man's sin the earth was cursed, and man was made to toil over the land just to make it produce.

This seems to have been a very harsh thing for a benevolent Creator to have done to the earth. Why curse the earth because of the sin of just one man? Man is only one creature out of many: did all other created things deserve the punishment for the sin of one? This is a very hard question to address, but man was made as the prominent creature of the earth. Man was given the responsibility to care for the entire earth. How could a fallen and sinful being care for a perfect world? Man would only be scarring a perfect planet by his mere presence. The Lord intended for man to have fellowship with Him and to live in harmony with nature. That would be impossible had the earth not felt the ramifications of man's sin along with man. Man is the creature with a soul; all other created beings were made to be helpers for man but were found to be inadequate, as was stated previously.

Now in doing this to man and the land, God also made provision. In the Levitical laws, the Jews were told to leave fields fallow every seven years to give the earth rest.

Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall
prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, but during the

seventh year the land shall have a Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard.³⁶

This was known as the Sabbatical year. Then every seventh Sabbatical year was known as the Year of Jubilee.³⁷

The Hebrew people had a strong relationship with the land, they knew how to cultivate. They understood that the land was actually the Lord's and they were only tenants. This led to a much different view of the land than is seen in the present day. Today land is seen as full property of the owner and that gives the right to do whatever is felt. In Hebraic times the land was cared for and respected. They knew that it really was not theirs and because of that greater care was taken. It is much like the idea of borrowing someone else's car. If someone went from driving their 1979 Volkswagen Rabbit to a 1995 Cadillac Sedan De Ville owned by their rich uncle, most likely much more care would be shown. It is the same concept. The Hebrews did not view the land as theirs, but as property of their "Rich Uncle."

Not only did the Hebrew people leave the land fallow every seven years, but they also returned the land to its original owners. This practice led to less selfish enrichment and more towards an ideal of betterment for the community as a whole.

Modern man should learn from this practice. Unlike a prominent bumper sticker that states "The land does not belong to us, we belong to the land", or the thought that the land is ours alone, the Hebrew people saw that the land was not theirs but the Lords. There is no reason to work the land until it is devoid of all its inherent nutrients. The earth is strong and can replenish after a while, but when anything is worked to extremes it becomes nearly impossible to

revitalize. Today's society needs to become less consumeristic in nature, where having more means being better, and start looking at the heart of people to determine their worth. Our society no longer understands its proper role in Creation.

* * * * *

Role of God in Creation: Today

To look at the true role of God in creation it needs to be established that the God who created the heavens and the earth is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.³⁸ In the prologue to the Gospel of John it is established that Christ brought all things into being and that “apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”³⁹

In the first chapter of the book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul addresses the person of Christ and His role by writing what is probably his most extensive teaching on the deity and work of Jesus Christ. This passage will serve as a basis and will be referred to often; however, it speaks well for itself and may not be addressed right away.

For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us To the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. *For by Him all things were created*, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or Dominions or rulers or authorities--*all things have been created by Him and for Him*. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, *and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*⁴⁰ (emphasis added)

Typically, when one thinks of God's (Christ's) creation, the particular things that come to

mind are generally plants, animals, mountains, streams, etc... However, the first thing that should come to mind is the human. Mankind is the foremost creation in both stature and responsibility. When examining the role of Christ in creation today the question really is, what is the fate of human beings? What is God's plan for humans, his most unique and privileged creation?

The answer to that question is found within the earlier quoted passage from the book of Colossians. It was stated previously that man is in a fallen state and logically the best possible end would be to come out of that fallen state. But how does one move from a fallen position to one of redemption? This passage in Colossians states that "[God] delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have *redemption*, the forgiveness of sins."⁴¹(emphasis added) It was God's plan for Christ to come to earth and "through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross..."⁴² But how does the cross, a simple and common way of killing someone in Roman times, redeem humans and reconcile all things?

This passage of Colossians states very clearly that Christ is God. The sin that man committed in the garden of Eden was against God. To pay adequately for this sin of mankind the appropriate penalty had to be paid. That penalty was one of death.⁴³ Since all sin is ultimately against God, the only possible way to pay for it is either by our eternal death and separation from God, or by God's gracious gift of His Son giving us eternal life and constant fellowship with Him in heaven.⁴⁴ However, this gracious gift was not without cost. The question earlier of how could a simple cross help to reconcile all things is answered here. Christ died on the cross to pay for the

sin of mankind and three days later He rose from the dead in victory over sin and death.⁴⁵

Still, how does one receive such a gift? How does that redeem mankind? The gift of eternal life and redemption is received simply by acknowledging and confessing the Lord as Savior.⁴⁶ Mankind receives the living Christ by faith as an act of the will. This is how mankind, as one part of creation is redeemed.

But if man is the only being with the capacity to reason and to “accept” something like the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, how will the rest of creation be redeemed? What is His plan for the rest of creation? It was stated before that God desires to “reconcile *all* things to Himself...”⁴⁷(emphasis added) In the Old Testament book of Isaiah it states:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing, and her people for gladness....The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain,” says the LORD.⁴⁸

What as a wonderful promise for the future of this world. Earlier in the same book, the prophet speaks of similar things. That there will be peace and harmony throughout the earth that is made possible because “...the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”⁴⁹

The New Testament's over-arching theme is the grace of God displayed through the person of Jesus Christ. Looking again at the first chapter of Colossians it is clearly seen that the Lord longs for reconciliation. This echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah years earlier.

Throughout the Bible it is clearly seen that the whole of creation reacts, or is acted upon,

due to the actions of mankind. Looking at the very beginning, the earth and the land were cursed because of Adam and Eve's sin. The land was acted upon. The book of Romans says, "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now..."⁵⁰ Creation is suffering because of the sin of man. Creation was cursed because of the sin of man and it feels pain because of that. That is not to personify nature, but it is suffering the ramifications of man's fallen nature. Christ not only came to reconcile man to Himself, but to restore creation as well. It is obvious throughout Scripture that the Lord cares for the whole earth.

The book of Matthew shows the idea of God loving the whole of creation very well. "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."⁵¹ Throughout the Psalms the earth is seen as praising the Lord. The earth is a part of God's creation and will continue to be so forever. Today the earth feels the ramifications of man's sinfulness, but there is a brighter tomorrow for the earth.

What will happen in the end times to restore creation as a whole is up for much debate. However, no matter the debate, Christ will reign in glory throughout the earth and creation will sing His praise. The book of Revelation is much debated as to how it should be interpreted (due to its apocalyptic nature). Many debate when the Millennium, the thousand year reign of Christ, will occur. No matter how this is interpreted it is clear that there "shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain;..."⁵² What a day that will be!

* * * * *

Role of the Christian: The land ethic

Knowing the roles of both God and man is all well and good, but what should and can be done with that information? Knowing what should be done is simply a step in the right direction. But knowledge is useless if it remains unaccompanied by action. Many people realize this and see that the earth is at a point where it desperately needs more care. In some places the environment seems to be past the point of no return in regard to a habitat that is either inviting to the human eye or, more importantly, that is capable of sustaining life. What can be done?

All people have a responsibility to care for the earth. However everyone, at some time or another, has neglected that responsibility. When the Lord gave Adam the command to care for the earth, He meant it to be true for all. Many Christians today ignore, or reason away, that command because actively caring for the earth is seen as something done only by those who profess non-Christian beliefs. In many cases, if a Christian lifts a finger to defend the environment, he is seen as one who has abandoned the faith and taken on a type of earth worship. However, this should not be the attitude of Christians. Clergy or lay people who feel that there is no real reason to care for the earth have never really studied the whole of Scripture. The Bible explicitly teaches respect for the earth. Incidents of harm toward the environment that can be found in Scripture are the exception, not the rule of the Christian ethic. The Christian land ethic is stronger than all others, because it is motivated by love for a benevolent Creator, not out of a felt obligation to the earth simply for earth's sake.

The entirety of the Christian faith is based on mankind's response to the ultimate gift. God paid the ultimate price for man by sending His Son to the earth to pay the penalty for mankind's transgression. Mankind is a fallen creature, and because of that his fellowship with the Lord has been inhibited. The gift of His Son restored that broken fellowship, but not automatically. As with all things man has to respond.

It is obvious that God loves His creation. Christians are as well to love and obey God with all that is within them. The Gospel of Mark carries within its pages possibly the farthest reaching command in the Bible. Jesus was asked by the Pharisees what the greatest commandment was, and the following was his answer.

The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these.⁵³

Christians are told first that the Lord is one and that love for God is the most important duty. Christians are to do good works not for the benefit that it will bring them, but because of a love for the Lord. Following this aspect comes the command that carries with it tangible effects for the environment.

Christians are to love their neighbors as they love themselves. The majority of people will do nothing knowingly to harm themselves or their future. If a Christian harms the environment, then that will, in effect, be harming a neighbor. There are many ways to harm the environment, and one is simply passive indifference to the wrongs that are being committed against the earth each and every day. To sit back and simply watch the destruction is a violation of the greatest

commandment in the Bible. First, because it harms our neighbor, but most importantly because we are to “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”⁵⁴ Harming the environment can in no way be construed as working for the Lord. There is no way that anyone can give true thanks to God in the process of doing damage to His earth. The Lord created this earth and He desires for it to be a pleasant place. But what can the average Christian do to help the environment?

The book of Second Chronicles contains an all important call to Christians. The Lord says to King Solomon that if “...My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and *will heal their land*.”⁵⁵ (emphasis added) The call for Christians is not necessarily to dedicate their lives to saving the earth, but to dedicate it to the Lord. Christians, those called by the name of the Lord, need to follow through on what the Lord asks of them and this land will be healed. If one believes that the Bible is truly the Word of God then this passage carries tremendous weight in today’s struggle to save the environment. However, do not misunderstand what is being communicated here. This is not a call to simply fall on bended knee and pray for the Lord to “do His thing.” Faith (and prayer) without works is useless. Christians are to be active in protecting God’s creation, not only the environment but all of His creation.

This call is not an easy one. As was discussed in a previous section, today’s society is very mechanistic in how it ascribes value. Two consequences of that lifestyle were discussed, but there is a third. It is the inevitable consequence of emptiness.⁵⁶ If one can be amazed by nothing, then what will bring joy to man’s heart? It is not more toys, or more “friends”, or fighting for a good

cause, true joy can only come from the Creator.⁵⁷ Having more friends or even more material goods can often add happiness, but joy is from the Lord. This mechanistic and secularistic society makes it very difficult for a Christian to follow the Lord in all aspects of society. If a Christian observes a problem and wants to do something to actively correct it, many people see this as a move to “indoctrinate” everyone into a Theocratic society. True, Christians do desire for all to come to repentance⁵⁸, but no one can force their beliefs on another. Beliefs are very personal and can only be changed from the inside, not from outside pressure. Then if the pressure from society as a whole were not enough the Christian must guard himself against going too far for a cause.

This brings about a caveat. Although the earth is intended to be a pleasant place, love for the earth can go too far. When one starts to “[worship] and [serve] the creature rather than the Creator”⁵⁹ problems will arise. Idolatry is found in many forms, and when anything takes the prominence of God, it becomes idolatry. The earth is very important and should be taken care of, but in all things there must be balance. One could easily lose sight of the real object of their efforts and become simply a person “on a mission,” not a person who desires to serve the Lord and worship Him alone.

Today legislation and hundreds of environmental groups are actively trying to make this earth a better place. These are all great efforts and many, if not all, have done well to heighten the world’s awareness to the problem that is at hand. However, from a Christian perspective these valiant efforts will never bring about lasting change. One can see that by looking at the racial divide that still exists in this country. There have been many noble efforts to erase racism from

the hearts and minds of all people. There has been legislation and awareness building activities, yet racism still exists. This is due to the fact that morals cannot be legislated. The heart of man must change for there to be lasting results. People need to fight the wrongs of the earth where it will be most effective. Each person needs to examine him/herself and live life as it ought to be lived out. These are not just the words of an idealist. Eventually a classless and perfect society will exist.⁶⁰ Not all people will humble themselves before the Lord, but this call is for Christians, not the entire earth. Too many Christians fight the social ills of the day on the periphery; however, the wars will never be won until these battles are fought at the core of the problem--sin.

Nature and the environment are beautiful, but they possess no soul. We are to first and foremost serve the Living God and devote our lives to pleasing Him and bringing glory to His name. Mankind is to be a steward of the earth. Man's responsibility is to cultivate and keep. God will empower him to do what needs to be done. Man needs only to follow Him with an undivided heart.

To close, I would like to borrow from C.S. Lewis.

Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol Scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fitfully reflects. And in there, in beyond Nature, we shall eat of the tree of life.⁶¹

NOTES

1. Genesis 1:16, Psalm 147:4 (Scripture references taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, Copyright © 1977 by The Lockman Foundation unless noted otherwise.)
2. Romans 1:20.
3. Ibid.
4. 2 Timothy 3:16.
5. See "Some Thoughts" in God in the Dock (© 1948), 148.
6. See R.C. Sproul's The Holiness of God. (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. © 1985). In the chapter entitled "The Holy Grail" Sproul examines the feat of creation in philosophical detail. This book gave great insight into how awe inspiring is the work of creation. 15-22.
7. Genesis 1:1. The book of Genesis contains the account of creation from the Judeo-Christian perspective.
8. Throughout the first chapter of the book of Genesis, God speaks and matter comes into existence which had not existed up to that point in time.
9. See Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. (Thomas Nelson Publishers: ed. Unger, Merrill F., and White, William Jr., © 1985), 51.
10. Ibid., 51.
11. Genesis 1:31.
12. Genesis 2:7.
13. Ibid.
14. See Roderick Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind. (Yale University Press: 3rd edition, © 1982), 16. In the first chapter, "Old World Roots of Opinion," Nash looks into the dominant value systems of our times, namely the Judeo-Christian system, and examines them in light of their attitude toward the environment.
15. Ibid., 19.

16. See the book of Exodus for more on the "wilderness experience" of the Israelites.
17. Nash, 20.
18. See Man, Myth & Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion and the Unknown (Vol. 13, ed Cavendish, Richard, © 1995), 1845.
19. See Tod Connor's "Is the Earth Alive" (*Christianity Today*, Jan. 11, 1993), 22-25. In this article Connor examines the implication of the Gaia hypothesis in regards to Christianity. It explains in sufficient detail the views of this hypothesis and the results of holding such a view within a Christian perspective.
20. Ibid., 25
21. Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23.
22. Connor., 25.
23. Genesis 2:8.
24. Genesis 2:9.
25. Genesis 2:15.
26. Genesis 2:19.
27. Genesis 1:28.
28. Ibid.
29. See "The Romance of Enchantment" in Can Man Live Without God by Ravi Zacharias (Word Publishing, © 1994), 85-88. This book deals mainly with Atheistic and Anti-theistic thought; however, much of it deals very appropriately with the dominant social paradigm of today and how that has affected life, including the environment.
30. Genesis 2:15.
31. Romans 3:23.
32. See The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Thomas Nelson Publishers, © 1990), within the *Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible*, 84.
33. Romans 8:7,8.

34. The preceding story and the Dostoevsky quote were taken from Why America Doesn't Work (Word Publishing, Colson, Chuck & Eckerd, Jack, © 1991), *A True Parable*.
35. Vines., 127.
36. Leviticus 25:3,4.
37. See The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Victor Books, ed. Walvoord, John F., Zuck, Roy B., vol. 1, © 1985), 210.
38. John 1:1-5, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:1-4.
39. John 1:3.
40. Colossians 1:13-20.
41. Colossians 1:13,14.
42. Colossians 1:20.
43. Romans 6:23.
44. John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8,9. See also Bill Bright's evangelistic tract "Have you heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?" which elucidates the principle spoken of in this text.
45. 1 Corinthians 15:3-6.
46. Romans 10:8-13.
47. Colossians 1:20.
48. Isaiah 65:17,18,25.
49. Isaiah 11:9.
50. Romans 8:22.
51. Matthew 6:29.
52. Revelation 21:4.
53. Mark 12:29-31.
54. Colossians 3:17.
55. 2 Chronicles 7:14.

- 56. Zacharias, 88.
- 57. Psalm 16:11, John 15:11.
- 58. 2 Peter 3:9.
- 59. Romans 2:25.
- 60. Revelation 22:1-6.
- 61. Excerpt from Transposition and other Addresses.